

book department

Lionel Caplan. Administration and Politics in a Nepalese Town. (London, Oxford University Press: 1975). p. xiv, 240, xxvi.

This is Lionel Caplan's second major contribution to Nepalese Studies. His first book on Nepal, Land and Social Change in East Nepal: A Study of Hindu-Tribal Relations (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul; Berkeley, University of California Press: 1970), proved to be a thought-provoking and challenging book. The title and preface of the present work hold out equal promise.

Administration and Politics is a transition book. Not only has Caplan shifted his area of interest from east Nepal to west Nepal. He has also made a very pronounced shift in his approach. The present study is by no means limited to the typical ambience of the social anthropologist. Caplan says of this study, 'This book describes and analyses the process by which non-traditional influences have impinged on institutions and social relationships within a small town, and affected the links between townspeople and villagers.' (p.5). The town he has opted to study is 'Belaspur Bazaar', situated in the south-central part of 'Belaspur' district, of which it is the administrative capital and market centre. Both by his selection of a district administrative centre for his field research and his proposal to study the process of change along with the affect of that process on the linkage between townspeople and villagers, Caplan has necessarily entered into a study of the history of 'Belaspur' as well as into contemporary politics. As a result, we have in Administration and Politics an amalgam of sociology, history, political science, and economics. The prospect is challenging indeed, as Caplan himself was clearly aware when he wrote, 'In view of the virtual absence of sociological studies of administrative centres, this book, willy-nilly, breaks new ground.' (p. 8).

Caplan's Administration and Politics is not just a pioneering attempt to apply the techniques of observation and scientific analysis to the complex relationships that emerge in an administrative centre, however small. The book also reflects the current ferment in the world of sociology/social anthropology that is part of the social scientists' efforts to prove their relevance in a world that has become increasingly oriented towards economic development. Whether we like

it or not, all social scientists are under increasing pressure to express their findings in terms that have economic and political significance if they would penetrate the closed circle of economic-political thought that now governs the development process throughout the third world. If Caplan appears to have taken on more than any one man could possibly handle with skill, he is to be commended for perceiving and studying an area that is of vital significance in the development context of Nepal.

Before making a formal criticism of Caplan's book, it is important to me to say that I learned a great deal from Administration and Politics. Any criticism that I make later in this review must be seen against this background. The book is ambitious in its intents, challenging in its propositions, and fascinating in the detailed spelling out of the present structures of 'Belaspur'. To say less than this would be to do Caplan an injustice. However, in addition to being instructed and entertained, one must also be critical.

Caplan divides his work into three parts. The first deals with the recent background of 'Belaspur', the district capital. The second discusses the occupations of the townsmen in this district capital. And the third presents an analysis of the relations between townsmen and villagers. Any discussion of Caplan's Administration and Politics must focus on these three aspects of his work as well as his overall attempt to analyze the process of change.

Caplan is at his strongest when he is dealing with the direct observation techniques of the social anthropologist. His biographies of the leading characters in the process of change are invaluable. So also are his descriptions of the social components of the administrative centre and its environs. In this area he is on firm ground, and he shows it both in his comment and style.

I personally deplore Caplan's use of pseudonyms for both the place names and the characters who play a role in the process of change. I recognize, of course, the social anthropologist's desire to protect his sources. I feel rather strongly, however, that if a study of this nature is to have relevance, it must be open to verification. Anthropologists may feel at home in a world that is not directly related to verifiable data. Other social scientists do not. Undoubtedly

there is a methodological problem here, but the use of pseudonyms seems inadequate if the book is to have meaning beyond a narrow circle of academics. Of its nature, relevance requires that we be able to relate the proposed analysis to our own understanding of the problems of a particular area and its relationships with the development region as a whole. As it stands, it is difficult to see how Administration and Politics can serve as an adequate base-line against which future change can be measured. This has its importance, since many of the political structures Caplan describes have already undergone radical change, and, in this sense, the book was dated before it was even off the press.

If Caplan is on firm ground in his sociological description of 'Belaspur', in his historical description he is not. He is not an historian, and it shows. The historical background is inadequate. Built for the most part on oral history, it suffers from the defects common to oral history anywhere. The point of view is intensely localized and isolated from the main currents of Nepalese history. Oral history is an invaluable tool for the historian, but it must always be counter-balanced by a strong understanding of recorded history. There is nothing in Caplan's text or sources to indicate that he had made such an effort to achieve balance. The result is a distorted view of 'Belaspur' in its historical context. While a fair case could be made in favour of Caplan's description of the arbitrary use of the pajani and district authority during the Rana period (cf. pp. 33-38), his description of land tenure and landownership is totally inadequate to support the edifice he builds on it. I would go even further in my criticism. I think Caplan's description of lower-level appointments without entering into the far more significant flow of authority throughout the administrative district. For me, this raises two questions that require answers. First, is it possible to describe an administrative centre without describing in some detail the district of which it is the centre? Secondly, how are we to judge the effects of the process of change unless we have a more firm appreciation of the value-structure of society as it existed before the process of change was initiated.

To the general reader, my comments on Caplan's Administration and Politics on the basis of the historical foundations of his study may seem overly critical. However, I think they are justified if we look beyond the immediate contents of the book to the

intent and the methodology. If social anthropologists intend to deal with topics such as this one, we should be able to expect a solid foundation in social and economic history. Otherwise, their search for relevance is frustrated before they begin.

I am no more enthusiastic over Caplan's analysis of contemporary politics in 'Belaspur' than I have been of the historical foundations on which he has built his study. In part, this is true because there is a causal relationship between the history of the area and its current political struggles. But my criticism goes a bit further than that. In the third part of his book, Caplan has focussed on the rivalry between the bazaariyas of 'Belaspur' and the villagers of near-by 'Bukha' village as the focal point of his political analysis. After reading and re-reading his discussion of the interplay of current politics in the context of this 'Bukha'-'Belaspur' rivalry, I remain unconvinced that Caplan's laboured explanation of the influence of kinship and friendship obligations on politics has added in any significant way to our understanding of the situation. While I am sure the rivalry he describes does in fact exist, I find his explanation of the origins and meaning of that rivalry unsatisfying and therefore unconvincing. In short, his analysis remains description. I am sure that sociologists and social anthropologists can contribute in a major way to our understanding of politics and the political process in developing areas. Caplan, however, does not seem to have made that contribution. Perhaps Caplan was himself aware of this when he took pains to point out that this study was a 'ground-breaking' effort. The suggestion that Caplan has not succeeded in demonstrating the contribution the social anthropologist can make to our understanding of political events in such a development centre as 'Belaspur', however, should not discourage us. The story is there to be told, and Caplan has achieved a great deal merely by pointing it out.

The reader will not be surprised, in view of my criticisms so far, if I say that in my opinion Caplan has failed in his basic intention in Administration and Politics ('This book describes and analyses the process by which [non-traditional influences] have impinged on institutions and social relationships within a small town, and affected the links between townspeople and villagers.') In certain areas he has given very adequate descriptions of the changes that have taken place in 'Belaspur'. In many areas, his descriptions

are excellent. But he has not given us, as he intended, an analysis of the process. Caplan describes factors of change which can be accepted as meaningful and pertinent. He has not, however, demonstrated that they are either exclusive or causative.

Am I demanding too much of Caplan? Of course I am. Several mitigating factors should be mentioned. Communications between Nepali scholars and foreign scholars are terribly unsatisfactory. Caplan simply did not have access during the period when he was writing to material that was readily available in Nepal and which could have contributed much to his study. It is difficult to see how he could be blamed for this inadequacy of communications, although lack of access to such data has certainly affected the quality of his work. A second mitigating factor should also be mentioned. Caplan's book was not addressed to a Nepali audience. It was inevitable that a Nepali would read and interpret Caplan's comments far more critically and from a much different point of view than would a group of his peers in other lands. There is still a third mitigating factor. I have held Caplan to a rather strict accounting for not achieving success in a study in which I think success would have eluded any individual effort. Though the area studied ('Belaspur') was small, the kind of study that Caplan intended would seem to have required the collaboration of a team of social scientists. Even the small world of 'Belaspur' is too complex to yield its meaning to a single analyst.

But let us keep my criticisms in context. In the area of his expertise, Caplan has done us all a great service. Even if he failed largely to achieve his wider purposes, what he has given us is good, solid material, which I for one am grateful to have at my disposal. Nor do I think he was wrong in attempting something that was a little larger than he could have hoped to achieve. Beginnings have to be made, and often the pioneer, by merely showing a route, can render a service of incalculable value.

Ludwig F. Stiller, S.J.

J. Gabriel Campbell, Saints and Householders: A Study of Hindu Ritual and Myth among the Kangra Rajputs, Bibliotheca Himalayica, Series 3, Vol. 6, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1976, 175 pages.

This book is a valuable contribution to the ethnographic material on the religious life of the Rajputs in the Kangra valley of North India. The author analyses the symbols, rituals, beliefs, and myths of this area using the structural approach of Levi-Strauss and Dumont. His aim is to elucidate the conceptual framework of the believer by examining the structures that underlie the religious system. Such an approach is particularly useful in the Indian context. It is often assumed that the contradictions of a particular religious complex and the inconsistencies between conceptual models and performed rituals are the result of two opposing traditions; a sanskritic one and a local popular one. Campbell shows by his analysis that this need not be the case. The contradictions are instead a basic part of the structure, expressed and resolved for the believer through ritual and myth. By bracketing the psychological, economic, and political factors and analysing the symbols contained in Kangra ritual and myth on their own terms, certain structural principles emerge.

Campbell finds a basic opposition between samsara, the cyclical course of earthly life, and moksa, the renunciation of that cycle. Hindu religion has two goals: to provide a means of living within the conditions of samsara and to provide a way of breaking out of this cycle. These goals are in essence contradictory. They are symbolized in the Kangra context respectively by the householder and the saint. When applied to the ethnographic material on life rituals and myths, some interesting patterns of meaning emerge. Life cycle rituals, samsaras, serve two purposes: they effect the transition between stages in the life cycle and resolve ritually, mythically, the contradiction between the conflicting goals of saint and householder.

In the section on rituals, the author presents both the ideal ritual models drawn from literary sources and a detailed account of Kangra ritual. He analyses the premarriage, marriage, and death rituals both in terms of this contradiction and in relation to kin and social relationships. Campbell notes that many of the prescribed pre-marriage rituals are not practised by the Rajputs or are condensed and incorporated into later rituals. Interesting questions arise as to why this discrepancy and variation occurs and what its implication might be. One wishes that the author had dealt more fully with this aspect of the rituals. The material in this section is quite extensive; it is well-organized and clearly analysed. and he supplements

his own data with many references from other studies of ritual in the Punjab. He includes an appendix comparing the rituals of Kangra to those in the nearby villages of Rampur, Bharmaur, and Sirkanda.

The analysis of myth is the most excellent portion of the book. In this section, the author shows how the basic structural themes and basic contradictions revealed in the analysis of the samsaras are represented in local myths of the Kangra Rajputs. He chooses three myths: the Gugga myth, the Baba Deot Sidh myth, and the Baba Balak Rupi myth. These myths are all about saints, dieties who are believed to have a human origin. These myths not only reveal basic oppositions but also present mediating categories that 'bridge' the categories in the opposition by resolving them on a religious plane. The myths express the saint/householder opposition as celibacy/ intercourse: fertility/ sterility and attempt to resolve the conflict between paternity and maternity reflected in the social sphere. The analysis in this section would be an excellent model for comparative analysis of similar myths in other cultural areas.

The author concludes with a brief discussion of change within structures using the example of a local sect, the Radha Soamis. He finds that change in the religious sphere tends to be replacive; "New" practices and values can be seen as 'structural transformations' of the old." Although he substantiates this with several examples from marriage and death rituals, this issue is dealt with in the same depth or detail that characterizes his structural analysis. The reviewer feels this section would be more useful and less of an afterthought if change in Kangra ritual and myth had been more extensively discussed and more ethnographic examples presented.

The book provides a very useful framework for the study of rural Hinduism that can be applied to comparative data elsewhere in South Asia. The ethnographic material on the Kangra Rajputs will be valuable for scholars of South Asia and the Himalayas. The author states in his introduction that the book was first completed in 1971. He states in the introduction that "the way I went about analysing data in this book is not necessarily the way I would do it now." Although the book and its methodology stands on its own as an important study of religious life, the reviewer regrets that the author did not discuss these comments more

fully in the introduction or in the conclusion. As the work plays a central part in the development of Campbell's thought, it would be of interest to the reader to know the author's current opinions of the study.

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Book Review

NEPAL: AN ASSERTIVE MONARCHY. Editor: S. D. Muni
Chetana Publications, New Delhi, 1977. pp. 251

In a macrocosmic world, one is apt to wonder as to the utility of a serious study of a country like Nepal in terms of either the significance of its historical evolution or its contemporary relevance. Why should an outsider bother about Nepal either historically or contemporaneously when, speaking roughly, she has not given birth to any great dramatic cultural or social movements that arouse and engage large masses of people? In a certain sense, Nepal has remained inadequately understood because she has tended to fall outside the focus of attention of traditional historians or comparatively misunderstood because she has been served sometimes by unsympathetic historians. This indifference or antipathy of historians, it should be said in fairness, has only been matched by the allergy of the Nepalese administration generally to the prying claims of research. Even today Nepal occupies an insignificant place in the columns of reputed commentators of the world scene who have almost entirely concentrated their attention on events and developments in powerful countries. She is approached if at all not on her own but to subserve the purposes of these countries. The picture of value in human experience that emerges in these circumstances is less than fair because in such major countries power seems to outpace grace, gentleness, charity and beauty. For this reason, the image that we have of the world in historical and contemporary perspective is an image that is more aggressive than peaceful, more power-loving than graceful and, in a word, more masculine than feminine. The weaker countries, like the weaker sex, suffer a great deal out of this bias in favour of power to the loss of the humanity as a whole.

On the other hand, a leading characteristic of the present epoch is the emergence of Asian and African countries as actors on the international scene. In this context, what are we to do with the bewildering variety of political experiments that variegates the third world landscape? All these countries and specially those under the British tutelage had started their new life with parliamentary democracy as their model. Yet among the major countries of Asia China has gone communist after a painful protracted struggle and India has experienced an emergency in peace time and is yet to develop into a full-fledged two-party system. In Burma parliamentary democracy has uncertainly given way to President Ne Win's Burmese way to socialism. Pakistan's course from parliamentary through military to democratic government has been far from smooth. In Africa shifting military governments and even new concepts such as 'ujima' propounded as a more appropriate ideal by statesmen like President Nyerere underscore the fluidity of the situation in relation to political ideologies. After a brief spell of about a decade with parliamentary democracy Nepal herself has been for the last seventeen years on the Panchayat course. In this complex situation political scientists are faced with a challenge of not only analyzing why these countries have severally moved away from the norms of parliamentary democracy but also sifting meticulously how many of these experiments are expressions of man's frequent but unfortunate aberrations toward or into tyranny and how many of them just gropings in the twilight for social systems which seek to tread the straight and narrow path between tyranny and anarchy. Political scientists are, however, handicapped in their objectivity in several ways. In the third world countries in particular, their education itself owes to an enormous advantage of privilege based on caste, class, wealth, family or even nation. They cannot develop vital creative contact with the people both because of the books they read and because of the association they cultivate. But the order of theory can be imposed on the chaos of the third world political practice only through the objectivity of political scientists.

To do this, we must be careful to approach Nepal in a proper and realistic framework of attitude. We should not expect her to be able to influence events abroad. We are no prophets to deliver a political or spiritual message. We have too limited resources to influence the world materially also. The proper

question to be asked about Nepal is whether her intense feelings and deep urges are such as to be consistent with the nobler experience of the rest of mankind and meaningful to them in a sort of sympathy and whether her social and cultural institutions - like monarchy, Buddhism, Hinduism, for example, - operate practically in the interest of ensuring freedom, justice, order and welfare to her people. While Nepal's own private feelings, anguishes and urges, like those of many other smaller countries, cannot influence events abroad in any direct sense, they are perhaps important, nevertheless, to mankind to contribute to the restoration of a balance in what I have called above, for want of a better expression, a loudly masculine image of the world. It is, therefore, a matter of satisfaction that interest has perceptibly grown of late in a serious study of Nepal as a subject of significant political and historical experience among academic circles. This interest, it may be noted, is a function both of an increased intensity that we have imparted since the Revolution of 1950 to our own sense of feeling, thinking and living, on one hand, and, of the broader and deeper commitment of the more sensitive of the international community to modify the spectacles that distort the current view, on the other.

Viewed in this perspective, the book under review, namely, Nepal: An Assertive Monarchy is a microcosm. It is not concerned with the total experience of Nepalese history and culture, nor even with the totality of King Mahendra's regime. It is concerned only with the political part of his regime, both internal and external, and with the theoretical and practical implications underlying his political experiment of the Panchayat system. So far as the book is concerned, King Mahendra's theory and practice in this field is the epitome of Nepal. This theme, almost alone, runs common through the lively diversity of approach reflected in the writings of the dozen contributors to the volume, who are both national and foreign. And as the political process is after all a nation's sovereign process which, to be effective, disciplines and guides itself, refusing to accept anything above and extraneous to it and at the same time shapes, determines and even dictates all other social and cultural processes, the focus is well chosen. The regime's theoretical claims are taken seriously whether they derive directly from King Mahendra's own speeches or from official attempts at what purports to be a systematic exposition of his

Panchayat political philosophy such as The Panchayat: A Planned Democracy among others.

The book is divided into two parts and Dr. Muni sets the tone with his analytical introductory chapters to both. His central theme is the relationship between tradition and modernity in the zigzag course of the political modernization of Nepal. In analyzing this relationship he sees dialectics at work. His analysis is marked with insight at places particularly when he traces Nepal's political evolution through the fifties and sixties as an outcome of contradictions between tradition and modernity on one hand and those within tradition and within modernity on the other. He has equated the evolution of political institutions with that of the political elite consisting of the King, the Ranas and what he calls the hardcore and peripheral modernizing political elite. When he says peripheral elite he has in mind leaders who were attached to various mushroom political parties other than the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party and the Gorkha Parishad and who, on the whole, fought shy of elections in the politics of the fifties. He seems in addition to include implicitly in that category the bureaucrats, especially in the upper echelons of administration, who have been through the process of modern education. These groups, though possessed of modernizing potential, threw their weight, according to Dr. Muni, wholly with the King and allowed themselves to be used for his political purpose. These leaders are also the target of attack in the fourth chapter called Shifting Elite Loyalties by Dr. L.S. Baral who, however, seems to refuse to admit Gorkha Parishad leadership into the hardcore elite in Dr. Muni's sense. Dr. Baral sees the Nepalese political landscape in terms of black and white; and in the comfortable security of the ivory tower where discretion does not need to be the better part of valour he is not fair to a large number of former congressmen who have chosen to work from within the system for their own reasons or to the hardcore communists who, though non-Congress, can hardly be said to have shifting loyalties. As the basic political struggle in Nepal is for a larger freedom through practical political and economic development which promotes justice, honour and welfare to the people, the forces that strive towards this end in their own separate ways have become broadly polarized into 'nationalists', 'democrats' and 'communists'. In this situation the so-called peripheral group seems to have received a treatment out of

proportion to its political significance. The interesting interlude within the Panchayat system of the Graduate constituency and its two lively elections has been re-captured with considerable vividness and even brilliance in Dr. Lok Raj Baral's chapter. On the basis of detailed analysis of the course of elections and the crystallization of the candidates' manifestoes, Dr. Baral has read considerable scope for opposition politics in the Graduate constituency. As an opposition party in liberal societies forms an institutionalized part of the wider official establishment, so the Graduate constituency appeared for a time as a deliberate device designed to build into the Panchayat polity an institutionalized informed opposition so essential for any creative modern political development. However, with the Panchayat ethos of indirect election and no opposition the Graduate constituency with its potential for continuous and even radical opposition because of provision in it for direct nation-wide election in contrast to the elections to other constituencies was probably too far out of step, almost an anomaly, to be allowed time and experience to be integrated with the system itself. The opposition political role of students in developing countries is a familiar phenomenon and has been, generally, of considerable importance. Nepal is no exception. This is the subject of Dr. Chauhan's chapter in which he relates the political activities of students to the wider movement. As he writes from direct knowledge the picture is lively though not always balanced. If one were to accept the broad sweep of his definition of anti-Indianism, a large number of genuine Nepalese nationalists would come under the anti-Indian category. Mr. Shaha, in his Crises of Political Development, has brought his deep political understanding and long practical experience to bear on the interpretation of political development in Nepal in the light of such concepts of political science as identity, legitimacy, participation, etc. Though these concepts he dwells on are not new, he does add to our knowledge by writing with the clarity of one who is directly involved. He seems to suggest that as these concepts embody man's valuable actual political experience through the ages and across nations, Nepalese statesmen would do well to keep them in mind as relevant to their own purpose and guidance. Dr. Dhungel's essay on District Development Administration, though apparently out of step with the subjects of other chapters, is necessary as an illustration of Panchayat politics in practice in relation to development administration. The crux

of the problem, as the author points out, is reconciliation between three essential functions of the district administration. One such function is what is called the routine administration of looking after law and order and the collection of revenue in the district. As development can only flourish on a firm base of law and order and on an efficient collection of revenue, down-grading of the routine administration in the name of development beyond a point, as has become the fashion now-a-days, is perhaps mis-placed. Another essential function of the district administration is to promote local self-government and in the Panchayat system so loudly committed to decentralization it is more than a routine responsibility. Now, given the premise that modern administration must be more than routine in being clearly geared towards development, the relationship between the district administration as an agent of the national government and the local Panchayat as an institution to set the tone and temper of politics and development in the district has been for years a subject of constant strain. Thirdly, there is the question of co-ordination of the district administration with the various district units of the Central Departments. Dr. Dhungel has pointed out many lacunae in co-ordination that still exist in practice in spite of many innovations and reforms made from time to time and, for this reason, co-ordination has been less than satisfactory. The new district administration plan which is in operation was apparently prepared with these lacunae in mind and with a view to meeting them.

Mr. Mathur's concern in the volume, however, is of an entirely different kind. He picks up the apologias made on behalf of the Panchayat system, particularly The Panchayat: A Planned Democracy. The title of the essay itself, Intellectual Foundations of Monocracy, seems deliberately designed as a response to that particular treatise and the claim it makes. Although King Mahendra's own speeches as well as other apologias are quoted also, the principal point of attack is the argument advanced in The Panchayat. He pooh-poohs the very interpretation of individual-state relations, state-religion relations, the Dharma, Hinduism, Panchayat and monarchy as outlined in the said treatise and concludes with as much emotion as reason that the Panchayat philosophy is unsatisfactory as a serious intellectual discipline. Summing up, he says, "The case for the King's monocracy in Nepal, in ultimate analysis, does not rest on special features

of philosophical, sociological or historical traditions of Nepal, but is mainly founded upon the weaknesses of the political parties in general during 1950-60 and the failure of the major democracy-oriented political party viz Nepali Congress, in particular, to legitimize and institutionalize parliamentary form of government during the brief spell of its unquestioned political dominance in 1950-60." A careful analysis of the meaning or lack of meaning behind this sentence alone is enough to show that if the authors of the Panchayat were disturbingly insensitive to the claims of freedom and civil liberties and did not think through when they quoted a plethora of Hindu Scriptures and analyzed the Panchayat system in terms of various basic political concepts and issues, Mr. Mathur himself has not thought through either when suggesting an alternative. What is that parliamentary form of government, one wonders, which can be legitimized and institutionalized, as he says, in a country like Nepal in the course of mere eighteen months? When he says that political parties were weak during 1950-60 he does not seem to realize that he is begging questions. Why were the political parties weak and what are the political, economic and even cultural forces and conditions in Nepal behind that weakness? According to him, the Nepali Congress had unquestioned dominance as a party during 1959-60 while the parties were weak in general during 1950-60. Is 1959-60 outside 1950-60? Mr. Mathur would have been more convincing if he had been careful not to let his conclusion outstrip the logic of his argument. Whether or not one believes that there is scope for improvement in the Panchayat system or even need for its replacement, it is clear that there is a case for a more profound analysis of the Nepalese dilemma than Mr. Mathur has supplied.

Part II of the book is clearly less controversial and even more satisfactory. This may be due to the fact that King Mahendra achieved a greater measure of success in foreign policy than in home policy and that this achievement has been more universally recognized as such. His major achievements on the home front were a reign of comparatively undisturbed peace for seventeen years and the introduction of the Panchayat system. But during this period he made an outstanding contribution to Nepal's foreign relations by literally bringing her on the map of the world. In this, he was no doubt assisted by many favourable factors. The Revolution itself of 1950 had opened the door for the introduction of the kind of foreign policy he pursued. All over Asia and Africa there was a favourable climate of

resurgent nationalism. Besides, he possessed remarkable native intelligence which enabled him to grasp the sense of Nepal's history and the fundamentals of international power alignments. He could distinguish between essentials and non-essentials in a general sense. Above all, he had a clear sense of Nepal's national interest. He realized the importance of Nepal's relations with India; and while he knew that these were difficult in the light of his own experience in 1961-62 he always kept the door for dialogue open. In spite of the charges made against him he was aware of the danger of playing off India against China or China against India-even if they played that game-because, he knew that at a point of crisis, while they could well look after themselves, Nepal could be overwhelmed. Though he was determined to do all he could to raise Nepal to the fullest possible international status through a policy of friendship with all, he was particularly reluctant to get entangled in any international conflict whether between India and China or between India and Pakistan. It was his success in maintaining a balanced relationship specially with India and China that paved the way for general international interest in Nepal including that of the superpowers. Different writers in the book do bring their own individual and national prejudices into their analysis and see room for criticism of certain individual aspects of King Mahendra's foreign policy. Dr. Leo Rose, for example, believes that Nepal has been too naive in building the Araniko Road without fully considering its security implications either for herself or for India. He probably sees in this development a drift towards what is called Finlandization in Western international parlance. This fear is shared by Mr. Kumar also perhaps for different reasons. Even recognizing the long-term security implications of the Road and the need for corresponding strategic adjustment both politically and technically, it is possible to maintain that the advantage even in the sense of security when what Dr. Rose calls a useless road is fully integrated into Nepal's national economy far outweighs the apparent disadvantage which only makes necessary some strategic adjustment at the moment. Such individual or national differences in perception are unavoidable; and to a Nepalese mind, a more balanced sense of security accruing from the potential of the Road for greater economic and trade development is an important factor for consideration. But taken as a whole the contributors have expressed general appreciation or understanding of King Mahendra's policy.

What is particularly agreeable about the book is the suggestion that Nepal's political experience is of sufficiently serious import to engage the attention of scholars in three countries. The central theme, as the title of the book suggests, is King Mahendra's assertive personality which is juxtaposed against liberalism which is the frame of reference for most writers if not all. There are occasions in the book when one feels the uneasy tension between the attraction that a writer betrays towards King Mahendra's assertive personality and his own convictions as a liberal. Behind the staying power of the Panchayat system which is already seventeen years old as compared with the ten years of parliamentary democracy there are, besides individual political ambitions and traditions geared to foster them, social and economic factors which need to be analyzed more fully and objectively than is done in the book not necessarily to justify but to explain the existing state of things.

When all is said, this is a serious book, at times perhaps provocative, but a book which deserves to be read seriously.

Y. N. Khanal

